

STAND (Students Taking Action in a New Direction)

When you STAND for something, you do not STAND alone.

Somerset, like the rest of the state of Wisconsin, has a reputation of allowing underage consumption of alcohol. Out-of-state people ask Wisconsinites, “Can you really give your kids alcohol?” The answer is “Yes, the law says as long as a parent is there, they can give their child alcohol.”

The law has fostered an environment in which parents compare underage drinking with a math class. “This law gives me the power to teach my kids to drink in a responsible way. If I let them get wasted, hopefully they will not do it in college,” says a Somerset parent. As we dove deeper into this issue, we discovered that, based on the information gathered for the St. Croix County Community Health Improvement Plan, St. Croix County ranks in the top 10 of counties for adult binge drinking in the state.

As residents, some adults use the law as a crutch to facilitate underage consumption. Could we really be facilitating the next generation of adult binge drinkers? We had two major underage drinking consumption events in the past year.

The first one was a one-car motor vehicle crash involving three Somerset High School Students and one adult. Two people were killed in the accident. Both of the victims currently have siblings in the high school. As most of our students are getting for prom, the victims’ siblings are preparing impact statements. The driver, a senior student last spring, is to be sentenced to prison on May 3, 2010. He also has siblings at the high school. The fourth and final person in the car has transferred to an alternative education program.

The other incident was in January 2010. Students posted pictures on their Facebook pages of a party showing parents and students drinking together. As word spread throughout the school and community, parents openly stated they were teaching their children to drink and that the law was on their side.

These incidents both led to tough discussions in the school by parents and students alike. Somerset High School Athletic Director and AODA Advisor Brad Nemec said, “Having students telling parents this is not acceptable is the only way the message will be heard. The group does a great job of getting the message out there.”

SOLUTIONS

1. **STAND—Student Impact** Students designed a logo with the acronym STAY (Support Toward Alcohol-Free Youth). This allows the students to take ownership of their message and then disperse signs to parents/community members, after they have voluntarily signed a contract. Once the contract has been signed, a sign will be placed in the parent/community member’s yard to have a visual acknowledgement that their household will not condone underage drinking on the premises. Fifty percent of the cost for the signs was paid for by the Governor’s School Health Award prize money received by Somerset High School.
2. **Department of Justice Grant—On Site Counseling:** We utilized the position supported by this grant as a way for our students to seek professional counseling, if they are either experiencing addiction themselves or living with addiction issues in the home. This counseling is conducted in a confidential setting, which fosters the appropriate referrals.
3. **St. Croix County Health Improvement Plan:** This is a regional planning group, with a focus on the health of our county.

After much discussion, the STAND group, Somerset School AODA Counselor, and the St. Croix County Health Improvement Planning group developed a “Root Cause Analysis.” They found that binge drinking is the number one health issue when dealing with underage drinking. The “Cultural Direct Cause” was determined to be a lack of education about alcohol.

As a high school group, STAND has become very successful, with a 10 percent membership (45 members of the student body). Our partnerships with local, regional, and statewide government and other

organizations have shown the students that the message will be changed; and with diligence and perseverance, the lawmakers will eventually listen.

*We learned this from you; it's time
to make some changes.*

*Student Leader, Somerset
High School Operation Prom*

*My parents take me to the bar with
them, so I can drive them home.
They are being responsible.*

*Student, Somerset High
School*

The number one priority is student involvement, starting with getting the students to be convinced to maintain an alcohol-free high school career. Second and most importantly, the primary concept of STAND is promoting positive choices by students—inclusively, not exclusively. The STAND group has several subcommittees to promote these health choices: anti-smoking anti-drinking, health and exercise, and anti-drugs. This allows the student membership to pick their causes. By promoting membership by cause, the students who might not always make the best choices have an opportunity to be a voice for their cause.

“These kids have worked hard to get their message out, even when people would not listen. They proudly took their STAND.”

Gail Colligan, AODA Counselor

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